

# Reparation issue can't be stopped

The rush for the exits began long before delegates arrived in Durban, South Africa, for the World Conference Against Racism (WACAR).

England and the USA — the two biggest beneficiaries of the 400-year-old British Slave Trade that brought Black Africans in shackles across the Atlantic and into the sub-human bondage that built the economic foundations of western capitalism — first threatened to abstain and then dashed for the safety of absence from Durban. And Canada, whose comparatively small history of Black slavery does not include the large-scale purchase of slaves from slave ships, somehow found it necessary to give the impression it was rushing for the exits too.

What is more, all three countries kept their national media with them. Not so much in the sense that the media did not go to the conference, as that it faithfully reflected the side issues of its countries' concerns rather than report on the substantive issues of the conference itself.

This mad rush for the exits was garbed in escapist coats of many colours, with one colour standing out: the overwhelming need to maintain good relations with Israel which was expressed in the struggle to avoid equating Zionism with

## DATELINE OTTAWA

with EWART WALTERS

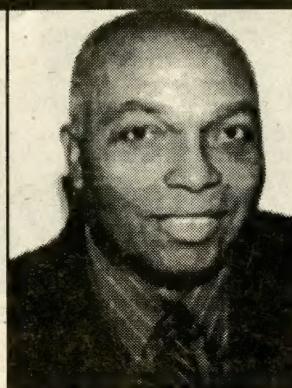
racism in the final conference communiqué. Other colours included the presence of people such as Yasser Arafat and Fidel Castro at the conference.

Or the fact that two or three African leaders found a way to break Black solidarity around the issue of Reparations, which Black countries want for the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Ah! There it is. The new "R" word. More to be feared than being dubbed "racist", Reparations as a word is now imbued with the potential to make superpower nations cringe and flee! From what?

They are fleeing the prospect of admitting responsibility for back pay. They are fleeing acknowledging that they owe a debt — monetary and well as emotional — to the millions of Black men, women and children who were forced, under pain of the lash of the whip, to toil in the sun, day after back-breaking day, year after year, to make White people rich.

They are fleeing a redress that would go some



EWART WALTERS

way to rectifying the economic imbalance of the world — an imbalance that moves as much on a White-Black axis as it does North-South. They will say and do anything — anything except apologize for slavery and pay the debt. But those countries — the USA and England — are the ones that have the history of enforced, long-term slavery. Not Canada, despite the presence of small numbers of slaves, principally in Quebec and Ontario. So it is more than a little perplexing why Canada thought it had to follow lock-step and minimize its delegation in the face of the Reparations judgement which even Belgium — a country with one of the worst histories of



### PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSIONS UNDERGROUND RAILROAD EXHIBIT

Parks Canada in partnership with the Ontario Black History Society and the Royal Ontario Museum invites you to attend information sessions to discuss the upcoming exhibit on the Underground Railroad.

The purpose is to provide information on the planning underway for the exhibit.

DATE: Wednesday, September 12, 2001

6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Thursday, September 13, 2001

10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

A short presentation will take place at 11:00 a.m., on Thursday, September 13, 2001.

LOCATION: St. Lawrence Hall, East Room, 157 King St. East Toronto, Ontario

CONTACT: Parks Canada,  
Ontario Service Centre,  
Phone: (613) 937-1319  
Fax: (613) 939-5729

Parks Canada

Ontario Black History Society

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### SÉANCES D'INFORMATION PUBLIQUES EXPOSITION SUR LE CHEMIN DE FER CLANDESTIN

Parcs Canada, en partenariat avec la Société d'histoire des Noires en Ontario et le Musée royal de l'Ontario, vous invite à des séances d'information sur une exposition à venir consacrée au chemin de fer clandestin. Ces séances visent à vous renseigner sur la planification de l'exposition.

DATE: le mercredi 12 septembre 2001

de 18 h à 21 h

le jeudi, 13 septembre 2001

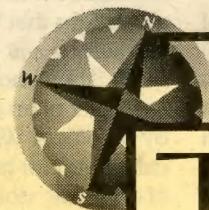
de 10 h à 21 h

Une brève présentation aura lieu à 11 h le jeudi 13 septembre 2001.

LIEU: St. Lawrence Hall, Salle Est 157, rue King Est Toronto (Ontario)

RESEINGNEMENTS: Parcs Canada,  
Centre des services de l'Ontario  
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TRAVEL INDUSTRY

# Cops counter bad press with own PR

By TIM WISE

Image is everything, or so the commercial says. In an age of public relations, how one is portrayed can be every bit as important as the substance of one's actions. Thus, it should come as no surprise that along with politicians, entertainers and corporate executives, even police departments have joined the p.r. game.

With one after another discovery of police misconduct around the country — from high-visibility cases of brutality, to racial profiling, to corruption involving bribes and the planting of evidence — the recent headlines have been anything but flattering. Since the beating of Rodney King, the American masses have been made more aware than ever that Officer Friendly is not often there to get your cat out of the tree. Sometimes his intentions are far more pernicious than that.

And so it is no shock to see police across the nation cranking up their own propaganda mills so as to counter the trend of bad press. In the wake of scandal, how better to get the public on your side than to portray yourself as under siege? How better to gain sympathy than to remind the citizens how crucial you ostensibly are to their own safety? A little crime scare can go a long way.

Case in point: recent headlines from Cincinnati and Nashville. In the former, the police have been trying for months to excuse their well-documented overreactions to perceived danger. Since the mid-1990's officers there have killed 16 Black men, many under highly suspicious circumstances, including Timothy Thomas, shot in the back this past April while running away from arrest on minor traffic violations.

Ever since the rebellion that was triggered by the Thomas shooting, police have been working overtime to portray the "rioters" as terrorists with no legitimate grievances against the cops.

Keith Fangman, head of the local Fraternal Order of Police, called a press conference immediately after the April shooting to display pictures of all the police in Cincinnati who have been killed in the line of duty. Stretching back many years, their photos hung behind Fangman's podium like a Wall of Fame, and Fangman made sure to point out that many of these officers were killed by black men, just like Tim Thomas. The none-too-subliminal message was plain: you can't be too careful, especially with "those

nal to differentiate real racism from valid policing, so cops can't take the chance, and shouldn't be expected to do their jobs. That this work slowdown by White officers is a kind of insubordination that would get Black people fired from any position in the nation seems to escape mention. That Cincinnati's Blacks are quite capable of differentiating legitimate law enforcement from racist brutalization — as evidenced by the community's acceptance of the latest shooting, which was made necessary by the suspect's firing on the officer first — also seems not to phase Fangman and his bunch.

Yet the Mayor's response to the refusal of Cincinnati's finest to do their jobs has been laughable. "Acts of kindness to police officers," Charlie Lukens says, "would be appropriate at this time." In other words, there will be no insistence that the police do what they are paid to do, and do it equitably. Instead there is only a plea for Cincinnatians to hug cops and thank them for their selfless actions. Apparently the FOP spin-mill is working.

So too in Nashville, Tennessee — my hometown, and the site of at least a half dozen scandals and questionable incidents involving police in recent years. First there were allegations that White officers physically assaulted Latinos: allegations still being investigated by the Justice Department. Then another officer was found to be moonlighting as owner of an adult club for swingers. This was followed by an officer who sexually assaulted a woman who had called him for help. Then there was the cop with a record of domestic violence. Then there were multiple shootings of Blacks, including at least one in the back of the head. And to cap it all off: the decision by police not to shoot a White officer, even though that officer had shot at them, should hardly be surprising, given the history of police attitudes



TIM WISE

based street gang, the Gangster Disciples, are planning to take over the drug trade in one of the city's public housing projects. Furthermore, according to these sources (whose claims are admittedly uncorroborated), the gang members are threatening to "shoot officers in the head to avoid body armor." The internal police memo, which both daily papers secretly "obtained" (most likely via police fax machine), went on to say that although the threats were specific to one particular housing development, police should be on alert in "all areas in and around" the development as well. In other words, most of North Nashville: the historically Black section of town.

Although police admit that gang activity in general is not increasing in Nashville, and although the local FBI special agent for violent crimes says he knows of no threats to kill police, the local paper insisted on plugging the gang menace for two days straight. The Metro Development and Housing Agency also says they have no evidence that the Gangster Disciples are making a move on the projects. The police, for their part, had literally nothing to offer as evidence, though they did caution Nashvillians to be on the lookout for Black people in blue, black or white clothing, or carrying a "rabbit head with a bent ear."

Now imagine if I were to send out a press alert claiming that unnamed sources had told me Nashville police were planning to lynch a half dozen Blacks in that same housing project. I could come up with some quotes, and claim the sources were reliable, all the while refusing to provide evidence. Given such a scenario, it is incomprehensible to think that such a story would have seen the light of day. But casting aspersions upon Blacks in the projects and claiming they are out to kill cops appears to be perfectly acceptable.

The heart of the story — that police are operating under threat of death — seemed blatantly calculated to swing public support back towards the police, by typifying officers as brave warriors going to battle against a dark (pun intended) enemy force. The fact that less than 20 officers in the entire nation are killed by Black people annually, (let alone Black gang members), and that this is less than the combined total of cops who die from accidental falls, drowning and while directing traffic, hardly seems to matter.

Fact is, the fear of gang members preying on innocent bystanders and cops, which has frequently been trumpeted by officials of the media, has provided the perfect opportunity for police to do what they do best: act like cowards.